



STEP 2

**ENGAGING YOUR
EMPLOYEES**



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STEP 2: HOW TO ENGAGE EMPLOYEES (Focus on Communication & Marketing)

Although you need to walk through all of the planning steps before developing your Communications and Marketing plan, here are some of the key considerations you want to take into account in engaging your employees so they become active participants in your wellness program.

EMPLOYEE READINESS: STAGES OF CHANGE

A major factor to be aware of is that people vary greatly in their readiness to change behavior. You may want to use your survey of employees to identify what percent of employees are at the various stages so that you can gear your program accordingly. The specific survey questions that can identify the levels are identified at the end of this section.

STAGES OF CHANGE. Most people go through five stages in changing behaviors:

- ❖ **Pre-contemplation** – At this stage, employees are not thinking about changing their behavior in the near future.
- ❖ **Contemplation** – Employees are beginning to seriously think about changing their behavior in the near future (next six months).
- ❖ **Preparation** – at this stage, most people have tried to change their behavior at least once in the past year, and they are thinking about trying again within the next month.
- ❖ **Action** – Employees are actively taking steps to change their behavior. This is the stage where a slip is most likely to occur.
- ❖ **Maintenance** – This stage applies to people who have changed their behavior for over six months and are now maintaining that healthy behavior.

People can move from one stage to another in order, but they can also move back and forth between the various stages before they adopt a behavior for good. Again, a slip is not a failure, but an important part of the learning and behavior change process. Most people may attempt healthy behavior change several times before they succeed and the chance of success increases every time.

The pre-survey of employees (Appendix C) has questions for physical activity (Q #1), nutrition (Q #3) and tobacco use (Q #6) that ask what stage an individual is at. You should look at the results from these questions to better understand where your employees are at and tailor your programming accordingly. As an example, if the majority of employees are over 50 years of age and are only moderately active, a graduated walking program might be a good place to start for physical activity programming.

COMMUNICATIONS

Effective employee communication is a vital aspect of any wellness initiative and the programs that support the initiative. Proper communication shows employees that the company values them. Conversely, lack of communication can make them feel underappreciated, fostering discontentment and low morale. When strategizing on how your company will carry out the communication and marketing that supports the wellness initiative take into consideration the following strategies.

Ways to Communicate Your Wellness Initiative

There are an endless number of ways to communicate to your employees in today's technology age. However, it's important to know the demographics of your workforce. This includes most used communication style. Once this is understood your company may require using several different types of marketing strategies and communication for one program. It is also important to balance technological communication with face-to-face contact when carrying out a successful wellness initiative.

Ways to market and communicate wellness to your employees:

- ❖ E-mail
- ❖ Videos (online or broadcast on televisions around the building)
- ❖ Blogs (written by CEOs, other executives and managers)
- ❖ Podcasts
- ❖ Intranet
- ❖ Hotline telephone number for wellness information or important announcements
- ❖ Newsletters
- ❖ Bulletin boards (online or physical)
- ❖ Companywide meetings
- ❖ Lunch and Learns
- ❖ Department-wide meetings
- ❖ CEOs or executives walking around chatting with employees
- ❖ One-on-one meetings between employees and wellness advisor
- ❖ Getting employee input – use online surveys
- ❖ Library of resources: online or hard copy

Several tips will help make sure your wellness efforts are successful.

Know your audience. Successful campaigns get that way because marketers know their audience. They fully understand their needs, how to help meet those needs and how to create demand. This will help create a successful program.

Never work alone. The most creative ideas come from working with other creative people. Utilize your wellness committee communicate and market wellness ideas effectively.

Consistent messaging. Consider the entire user experience before you launch a campaign. From email to website to offer, is the prospect having a consistent user experience? If they are, your campaigns stand above 98% of others.

Create value for the program. To engage your employees in wellness you will need to show them how and why it is valuable for them to participate.

Lead by example. Make sure that there is consistent messaging in actions and words from the executive team through the managers to workers. The best marketing comes from leaders acting out wellness by participating and vocalizing their interest, appreciation and importance of the program.

Placing your marketing. Strategically place informational flyers, promotional posters and other written or graphic material in areas where employees will see the information. Unusual, but great target areas include bathroom stalls, bulletin boards next to microwaves or time clocks, table tents in lunch and break areas, stairwells, etc.



MAINTAINING INTEREST

Once you start a program, you will have a range of employee participants. Some will already be very engaged in being active, eating well and doing stress management and your program will only reinforce and enhance their health. On the other end of the spectrum will be people who may not engage no matter what you do. The remaining group is probably the largest group in most organizations: people who are various stages of readiness to improve their health given the right type of programming and motivation. Summarized below are some tips you may want to employ once your program is up and running.

Key Factors

In today's society, many key factors influence people's health behaviors. Consider the following list in maintaining participation in your program:

1. **TIME.** People are busy, so the more you can work activity and healthy eating into their existing schedules, the better your chances for success. Example: A walk at lunch doesn't take away from existing time, it just uses it differently. Also, look at the time of the day and length of any activity you might be promoting, since both time components may be factors.
2. **ACCESS.** How accessible is your programming. Is it onsite or at a nearby site? Do you offer access at breaks or outside of normal work hours?
3. **KNOWLEDGE.** People need to know "Why" they are participating (the benefits) and also will need information about the "How to" in areas that are not commonly known. There is a wealth of information available on many wellness topics that can be found in the resource sections in Step Four.
4. **COST.** Being able to provide no cost or reduced cost programs will help participation rates. Coupled with incentives for participation, rates of participation will likely increase dramatically.
5. **INCENTIVES.** Some people need incentives to get started in a wellness program. A full list of incentive options can be found on the next page.

Key Time Periods

Good habits are often difficult to develop. There tends to be some critical times when people drop out or fall off a physical activity or diet program. The first key time zone seems to be around **6 weeks**. If people can start and stay consistent with a program through the first 6 weeks, they have made a fairly serious commitment to incorporate the habits into their lifestyle. The second key time is at about **6 months**. Those who made it past 6 weeks may get bored and/or distracted from their program after several months. If people can get past 6 months and sustain behavior through a full set of weather seasons, they have a very good chance of making the changes permanent.

Consider these time periods and think about how you can "boost" your employees to get them past these critical time markers. Promoting individual or group "challenges", using incentives, or increased publicity/marketing are a few of the things you can do to help get your employees through these key time periods

Goal Setting

Setting goals leads to better participation and more people making a strong commitment. Whether it be a team goal of walking the equivalent of once around Wisconsin or an individual goal of so many miles or minutes of activity, the fact that there is something concrete to shoot for increases the likelihood people will stick with the program. An example of a simple goal setting form can be found at <http://www.americanheart.org/downloadable/heart/1118082632055ActivityGoals.pdf>

Buddy Systems or Team Goals

The social aspects of improving one's health cannot be underestimated. Many studies point to tight social groups being the backbone for a successful campaign because each individual has a commitment

to something bigger than themselves and besides, it's just more fun for most people. Build your program around some type of teams or partners and see what happens.

Team “Campaigns”

Some people like competition and others do not. Nevertheless, a worksite wide campaign has the advantage of keeping the message more visible and alive. Encourage campaign participation, but make it voluntary so that those who prefer that type of motivation can join while others can participate in their own way and at their own pace. If the idea of a campaign seems like too much work, consider tapping into existing campaigns where someone else provides resources for you. Lighten Up Wisconsin is one example where you can enroll employee teams and let Lighten Up do the work for a nominal registration fee. Find out more information at: <http://www.lightenupwisconsin.com/>

A special consideration for campaigns is whether you do one long (several month) campaign per year or do several shorter (6-8 weeks) campaigns during the course of the year. There are advantages to both, but multiple, shorter campaigns have the following benefits:

- ❖ keeping programming fresh
- ❖ being able to target different health habits
- ❖ keeping people interested and motivated
- ❖ recruiting participants more often as new health habits are targeted over the course of the year



Incentives are often helpful in maintaining or raising interest. Significant incentives such as cash or health insurance rebates have proven to be very strong motivators for employee participation. However, even smaller incentives can be beneficial. Listed below are some sample incentives that will support your wellness program vision:

- ❖ **Achievement awards.** Verbal praise and a pat on the back are motivational to some, but a token of recognition of achievement may offer more. A colorful certificate to congratulate an employee for achieving a health-related goal is one example.
- ❖ **Public recognition.** Announced recognition at campaign mid-point or wrap-up festivities.
- ❖ **Food.** Include some healthy foods to kick-off, revitalize or wrap up a wellness campaign.
- ❖ **Entertainment.** Events serve a purpose in jump-starting, reenergizing or wrapping up a campaign. Having entertainment of any kind can boost morale.
- ❖ **Merchandise.** There is a long list of merchandise incentives, including sports equipment and small gift certificates to use at local merchants.
- ❖ **Monetary rewards.** Nothing says incentive better than cash. Worksites that have used cash or rebates as an incentive have shown much higher participation rates.
- ❖ **Time off.** Time off is maybe the next best incentive to cash, or for some people even better. This type of incentive makes good business sense if the number of absences drops significantly and attendance is used as one of the criteria.

Here's a list of incentives and the associated general participation rates:

Item	Participation Rate
Trinkets and T-Shirts	10-20%
Merchandise and Gift Certificates	40%
Tax-Advantaged Cash Incentives	50%
Benefit Plan Redesign	90-100%

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At a minimum, you should look at your current benefits package and see if there are wellness components that are already covered by your healthcare provider. If you have reimbursement opportunities for things like fitness classes or club memberships, you should have a plan to promote them so most employees take advantage of a benefit that is already covered by your benefits package.

Make sure that you understand the legal ramifications for incentives. See the specific document in Appendix F that summarizes HIPAA regulations for a Standards-Based Program.



FACTORS OUTSIDE THE WORKSITE

Worksite information and programming is what many people associate with worksite wellness programs. It is certainly a major part of a program and many of the ideas for engaging employees will revolve around this aspect. Nevertheless, your program should use several methods to get your employees involved and not just focus on the information and programming piece.

SELF-CARE, FAMILY AND HEALTHCARE PROVIDER INVOLVEMENT

Self-care, family involvement and healthcare provider involvement have been shown to improve a person's success in adopting and maintaining good health habits. Anything you can do to encourage employees, their families and their healthcare provider to be actively involved in the employee's personal health will complement your efforts at the worksite.

Regardless of what strategies you use at work for wellness, some of your success will depend on an employee's self-motivation, family involvement and their tie-in with their medical provider. Although the work environment is a key site for wellness, extending your efforts beyond that setting will increase success and make it easier to maintain a high percentage of healthy, low risk employees that will add productivity and decrease healthcare costs. Here are a few suggestions for those three areas:

Self Care or personal interest in one's health is very important because you want employees to be proactive in taking care of their personal health. Examples of self-care would include seeking more healthcare information, exercising, and diet monitoring or following medical instructions to best deal with a health condition. Through self-care, you are empowering employees to take charge of their own health and to make better decisions, which in turn will make it easier to get them involved in your wellness program activities. To encourage self-care, make sure that you provide good information and resources to employees who are looking for additional resources. Some examples are:

- ❖ **Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality** has a list of key screening exams and information about interacting with healthcare providers. Key resources include:
 - Men: Stay Healthy at Any Age <http://www.ahrq.gov/healthymen/>
 - Women: Stay Healthy at Any Age <http://www.ahrq.gov/ppip/healthywom.htm>
 - "Questions are the Answer" for ideas on talking with health care providers. <http://www.ahrq.gov/questionsaretheanswer/index.html>
- ❖ **HealthFinder.gov** is an excellent source of health information for employees. Resources include:
 - General resources: www.healthfinder.gov
 - Calculators for individual health topics (e.g. Alcohol and Drugs | Caregiving | Diseases and Conditions | Men's Health | Nutrition | Prevention and Wellness | Smoking | Women's Health <http://www.healthfinder.gov/HealthTools/Calculators.aspx>
- ❖ **WebMD** is a good source for individuals to find general medical information www.webmd.com

Family Involvement can often make a difference because of the social support and encouragement it provides. Parent ↔ Child and Parent ↔ Parent behavior can be influenced or reinforced by good family member health habits and that reinforcement and encouragement works both ways. The healthier all family members are the more likely your employee will be healthy.

It is also a smart business decision because:

- ❖ Healthcare costs/insurance often includes spouse and kids.
- ❖ Sick children can result in increased work tardiness, early departures from work and absenteeism among parents who must provide transportation or care for their child.
- ❖ Today's kids are tomorrow's workforce
 - They can walk in the door with healthy habits that may last a lifetime or
 - They can walk in the door with bad habits that start costing the employer immediately and continue for the length of their employment (up to 40 years!)

Connecting With a Healthcare Provider

Coordination with the healthcare provider should be a major part of your wellness program. There are many aspects of “wellness” that need to be addressed in the healthcare setting, so working closely with the healthcare provider is essential. Encouraging participants to establish a solid relationship with their healthcare provider will enhance the results of your wellness program.

Keep in mind that your wellness program is only one part of what contributes to healthy employees. The healthcare provider is another part, and you want the treatment piece of wellness to be well coordinated with your program. In addition the healthcare provider can help reinforce your wellness program's focus on preventive steps. As a starting point, a follow-up plan for HRAs and biometric screenings should actively involve the employee's healthcare provider. A systematic referral plan for screening results that require medical follow-up is key to addressing high-risk health factors.

